

**DRAFT**  
**Washington State Board of Health**  
**Policy & Procedure**

**Policy Number: 2005-002**

**Subject: Media Guidelines: Guidance for news media relations and reporter contacts**

**Approved Date: December 7, 2005**

**Background and Purpose**

Public perception of the Washington State Board of Health will be influenced by the reports that people read, hear, and see in newspapers and on radio and television news. The Board's goal in media and public relations is to be an open, professional, and responsive organization. A media policy predicated on access will help Washington residents understand the value of its work.

The purpose of this policy is to define who must be notified when the Board or its staff is contacted by the media and who should best respond on behalf of the Board.

**Policies**

- 1) Media requests for information and interviews should receive priority attention. Reporters and editors usually work on deadlines, and timely responses should be the standard. If another priority prevents a prompt response, a courtesy call should be made to the reporter confirming what information is requested and advising when the requested information will be available.
- 2) The main point of contact for the media is the Public Information Officer, who is responsible for initiating contacts, developing press releases and other media outreach, tracking and responding to requests, providing information that is a matter of record, obtaining details about the reporters' deadlines and the nature of their stories, and ensuring that the appropriate person responds promptly to interview requests.
- 3) The Board member who is most knowledgeable on a particular issue is generally the best person to respond to an interview request. This is usually the chair of the appropriate policy committee, the sponsor of a particular rule, or the Board Chair. A Board member may recommend that a staff member respond instead.
- 4) The Executive Director is the main media spokesperson for the staff and will usually respond to an interview request at the suggestion of a Board member or when no Board member is readily available. The Executive Director may delegate this responsibility to the most knowledgeable staff person.
- 5) Staff members may exercise their judgment about granting interviews and providing information on behalf of the agency when they are approached by a reporter and it is not practical to involve a Board member or the Executive Director; however, no employee is

required to consent to an interview. Any employee who speaks on behalf of the agency is responsible for what is said. Employees are encouraged to ask the reporter questions about their news story, and take time to prepare before answering. It is often advisable to get their number and call back after preparing.

- 6) Staff members must notify the Executive Director and the Public Information Officer after participating in a media interview. A short summary of the kind of questions and the answers provided, sent by e-mail, is the easiest and most effective method of reporting a media contact.
- 7) No staff members are prohibited from talking about their work while clearly representing themselves as individuals. Employees should understand, however, that their comments on public issues are likely to be interpreted as the State Board of Health's point of view.
- 8) In the event that a Board member responds to a direct reporter request about Board business, she or he should exercise good judgment and provide a summary of the interview by e-mail to the Public Information Officer.